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# Linowitz, Sol M. oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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## **Interview with Sol M. Linowitz by Don Nicoll**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Linowitz, Sol M., 1913-

### **Interviewer**

Nicoll, Don

### **Date**

May 2, 2000

### **Place**

Washington, DC

### **ID Number**

MOH 185

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### **Biographical Note**

Sol Linowitz was born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1913 to immigrant parents. His father was a successful fruit importer. He went to Hamilton College, and studied philosophy and German. At Hamilton, he met Elihu Root, who advised him to go on to law school. He graduated from Cornell Law School in 1935. Linowitz has had a distinguished career since, serving as a successful lawyer and chairman of the board at Xerox. He later served as U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States, Ambassador to Middle East peace negotiations, and was a co-negotiator of the Panama Canal Treaty. He also practiced law until his retirement in 1994. He was a close advisor to Edmund Muskie during his presidential campaigns and his tenure as Secretary of State.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: Muskie in law school; seeing Muskie after his election to the Senate; relationship with Muskie after 1966; meeting with Muskie at the F Street Club; advising Muskie on foreign policy during the presidential campaigns and as Secretary of State; Muskie's resolution of problems at the State Department; Muskie's attitude toward the Vietnam War; Latin America; and the trip to the Middle East.

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## **Transcript**

**Don Nicoll:** It is Tuesday, the 2nd of May, the year 2000. We are at the Academy for Educational Development in Washington, D.C., eleven o'clock in the morning with the second interview of Ambassador Sol Linowitz. The interviewer is Don Nicoll. Ambassador, the first time we talked you gave us some background on your own education and decision to go to law school, and then meeting a young Ed Muskie who was a freshman in your senior year at law school. And at that time, as I recall, you were the editor of the yearbook.

**Sol Linowitz:** Of the *Law Review*.

**DN:** Of the *Law Review*, excuse me, I'm in the wrong department. (*laughter*) And you indicated then that Ed was a shy student and didn't push himself very much. When did you meet him again?

**SL:** After law school. I think I met him a couple of times, next met him a couple of times in connection with law school get-togethers, alumni associations and so forth. And I, even though he was not much of an organization type, he was interested enough in keeping his contacts with the law school, and I think that's when I picked up again with him.

**DN:** And did you encounter him while he was governor of Maine?

**SL:** Sporadically I would see him, it was never on any fixed basis. But I always had a real regard and affection for him. Our experience together at the law school was always there and I could always get a chuckle out of reminding him of some of things or some of the people and so forth. It was quite clear that Ed Muskie had no idea of going into politics. And as I may have said before, if we had had a vote on the guy at the law school least likely to become a politician, he would have won hands down. He was not one who touted his own virtues or values, but he was a strict disciplinarian and, which went along with his shyness. He, as I remember, he never made an effort to reach out to people. That was true as long as I knew him. You came to Ed Muskie. Ed Muskie didn't go to you, as I remember.

**DN:** You mention his being a strict disciplinarian. Was that disciplining himself?

**SL:** Yes, yes. We shared an uncomfortable characteristic. We never thought we had done very well on examinations. We always anticipated that we wouldn't be among the high ranking graduates of the law school. Ed was a head shaker. He would come out of an exam with a look on his face that indicated that Armageddon had arrived, and with that grouchy effort to indicate how bad it was. He would like to put to you, if you knew him well enough or a friend of his, he would intersperse with a few profane words how lousy he had done and how bad it was going to be and so forth.

And of course it never was. He was always smart and that's how he got on the *Law Review*. So far as I know, he did not have friends that stayed with him during that period because it's not that he was resisted, it was simply that, he had his own idea of how to work with people, quietly, thoughtfully, but objectively. So that's the -

**DN:** When you, you saw him intermittently when he was governor, when he came to the Senate, did you see more of him?

**SL:** Yes, much more. I really at the beginning had no idea how he got into politics, and we would talk about that. He used to talk about the, I guess it was the, I can't remember what his father did but it was, made it possible for Ed to rent space. And I recall, I never saw this, but I remember Ed chuckling as he talked about the, you know, as he talked about the incredulity with which he recognized that he had become a politician. And he liked to be kidded about that.

**DN:** Did, do you recall what he said brought him to be a politician? Do you remember what he said brought him to be a politician?

**SL:** I can't recall specifics in exact words, but he demanded so much of himself and therefore of other people too, the discipline that he imposed on himself and on others so that he, when he first came to the senate he was incredulous that here he was as an elected official in the senate. Remember, when he came it was a big year, was it '60?

**DN:** Fifty-eight.

**SL:** Fifty-eight. He certainly was open-eyed when he came and I remember seeing him not long after he was elected and he said to me once, as I think of it, "I don't know what the hell I'm doing in this anyway."

Now there's a story around that time, I can't be sure it happened or that someone told me. I think I was involved as I'll tell you in a moment, but it was interesting and significant and I remembered it for that reason but not quite sure how I got the story. I was in Rochester, New York, and one day I got a phone call from Ed Muskie. He would like to see me and was I going to be in Washington. And I said, "No, I'm not going to be in Washington." He said, "Well then I'll come and see you." And he took the plane and came to Rochester and he said to me, this I remember, he said to me that he had decided he was going to quit the Senate and he wanted to talk to somebody who would help give him an objective view of what was involved. And he thought that I might do it because he knew he could trust my judgment or something nice like that.

He said that the reason this had come to a head, and he was clear that this was the right course for him, was that Jane had been shopping in a, one of these giant food stores, I can't remember now which one. And she was coming through the line and she gave the clerk a check for the amount that she had bought and they refused to take it. Just looked at it and said, "We can't take this," whatever the reason. And she said, "My husband is a Senator." And the clerk, it is my recollection, said, "Look lady, we got a hundred of them around here." And that gave him a feeling of not sure that he had done the right thing in which his wife was treated with disrespect. Interesting in the light of the subsequent tears or non tears later on. But I remember that, as I say I can't be sure of the details, but the point was that they mistreated her, they embarrassed her. She came, maybe she cried a little, but all of a sudden this was not the Garden of Eden.

**DN:** Was this fairly early in his time in the Senate?

**SL:** Yes.

**DN:** And when was it that you left Xerox?

**SL:** Nineteen sixty-six.

**DN:** So you, and you came to Washington at that time. And after that encounter, what advice did you give, by the way, when Ed asked you about leaving?

**SL:** Oh, by the time he, you know, I said the obvious thing, "You'll never again have the opportunity to pitch in for the things you believe in, and if you turn your back on this job you're out of public life." And, "Are you sure that that's what you really want or are you just teed off?" Only I didn't say teed off.

**DN:** And did you see him between then and 1966 when you came to Washington?

**SL:** Yeah, fuzzy, because I can't remember how many times, so, but we kept up a relationship. He was not a great letter writer, as I remember, so that most of the time you'd talk to him by

phone if you wanted to have a conversation. If you waited for him to send you a letter about something he said he would do, you know this better than I, he was not a guy who would follow through on a -

**DN:** Letters were not his thing. And starting in '66 when you were in Washington, and at that point you were involved in foreign policy, did you have any professional encounters related to your work? Or were they again 'old friend from law school days'?

**SL:** I did not, that I can recall, have any significant official relationship with him. I was an ambassador to the American, to the Organization of American States and when I would see Ed, he'd want to know how things are going, what am I doing and we would kid around about who was doing the more important job. It was that sort of thing, at some point in that period.

But I don't think I ever made the effort to crystallize or put together in a form that would correctly reflect the nature of our relationship. It was, well you, I don't know whether, when you were with Ed?

**DN:** I was with him from 19-, I had worked with him in Maine politics from '54 on, but I came on his staff in 1961 and was there until 1972, mid '72, and was his administrative assistant from '62 to 1970.

**SL:** Oh, really?

**DN:** So during that period I was there in Washington, and he was not at that time on the foreign relations committee. His only encounters with foreign policy came as a result of the Mansfield Mission on behalf of the president in connection with Vietnam when they had the round-the-world trip. And other than that, and some encounters with the Polish embassy during that period, we were not much engaged in foreign policy issues.

**SL:** To leapfrog, as you were talking just now, I'd almost forgotten this. When Ed was secretary of state I saw more of him than I had before. And his, Ed always was, he was a grouser and things were never quite good enough and, "Who the hell put this out?" and that sort of thing. And you'd laugh about it because it was vintage Muskie. But we got closer and he and I used to have lunch from time to time or just chat, chit-chat. And then he became secretary of state, and we saw even more of each other then. Not primarily, not primarily official, but involved with his interests and later his responsibility as secretary of state.

One day, this indicates the nature of our relationship; one day Ed called me and said he'd like to have lunch. I was a member then of the F Street Club and we had, several times, had lunch together upstairs. You know the, F Street Club, well they had rooms, private rooms upstairs, and he said he wanted to talk in private, he wanted to be sure it was in private. And I said that I thought that was a good idea, and we could meet together at 12:30 or whatever it was at the F Street Club. So we went upstairs and I said to them that the secretary of state was going to be here and he'll have his security people with him and so forth.

And after we talked for a bit Ed said to me, (Jimmy Carter was then running) he said to me that

he wanted to ask me something. "If Carter is reelected, would you be deputy secretary of state?" And he said he had talked to the president about this and he thought that it would be helpful to him if he had someone he knew and trusted who could work with him and so forth. And I said, "I'll think about it." I didn't jump at it. I know he talked to Berl Bernhard about it, for example, what Berl thought. And nothing became of it because Carter was not reelected. But as I say, maybe that gives you some idea of the character of the relationship.

**DN:** During that period from 1968 to 19-, well particularly the 1968 to 1972 period when he was running for vice president and then for president, did he consult with you on foreign policy matters?

**SL:** Yes. I think it's fair to say that we did not at first figure out where he wanted me to be in connection with his own development and foreign policy experience. He obviously loved the job of secretary of state, and he was very quick to seize upon a problem and want to shake it out. And I was, because of our relationship over the years, I was never awed by him. And I called him a grouch and that sort of thing, which he always chuckled about. He didn't take offense. And several times we talked, I can't remember specifics, we talked and it was "no" say, to say to him he was dead wrong about something. And he never, well he grunted and gave me the feeling that, "Where the hell had I picked up that kind of nonsense?" But he, you could bring him around. He was always open-minded, which I treasured, and as you knew very well.

And it was a remarkable experience to see this man increasingly familiar with tough foreign policy issues affecting this country. And I think, he used to say to me that he never got as much attention with all the time he was in the Senate, had never got as much attention as he did when he became secretary of state. That was . . . . He almost gleefully said to me, "You know how much mail I get on this," or something else. He was delighted with the fact that he was a big event. And of course the fact that his colleagues on the Hill were so warmly supportive insofar as I can recall now, and also those that he couldn't stand.

**DN:** What struck you about the way he tackled those problems in the Department of State particularly at that tough time, dealing with Iran, and at the same time the problems of the Arabs and Israelis going on? When he got into conversation with you, was there a particular pattern in the way he went after those issues, or sought your advice?

**SL:** My present recollection is that he was not a great reader in terms of . . . . That he was more a fellow who liked to talk it through, at least with me, rather than here's a great article you ought to read or here's that sort of thing. My present feeling is that he did not get his information that way. It almost always, not always, but almost always, would call me to talk about some issue, whether it's Vietnam or anything else, or Cuba, he would talk. He would call me, or have someone call me and say, "The secretary wants to see you." And then I'd say, "Sure," and "just say when." We went back to the F Street Club several times after that and talked, complete privacy. I don't know a special pattern that he followed, but I do know that it was great satisfaction to him to be the top foreign policy expert in the United States.

**DN:** Did you see much of a difference in the way he tackled the foreign policy issues when he was secretary of state from the time from '68 to '72 when he was seeking the vice presidency

and the presidency, when he was really just trying to get a handle on foreign policy?

**SL:** I don't know how to answer that. I think my best recollection is that problems would descend upon him, or ascend over him, and to the extent there was a uniformity of approach. He would want to be able to grill you with questions and zero in on things that he either did not understand or didn't really have the background, and therefore was trying to play catch up a great deal of the time. I think, looking back, that was his modus operandi, that was how he did it in my relationship with him.

**DN:** Did you and he ever have any philosophical disagreements. You've mentioned places where you thought he was wrong and told him so. Were there any fundamental disagreements that you had on foreign policy? Vietnam? Middle East?

**SL:** We talked about both of those and he was gutsy about them. He knew that the Middle East, for example, was a very explosive subject which had all kinds of ramifications, including political. But at least in our conversations, he didn't move, back away from stating his position and felt very strongly that in the Middle East the United States had a role to play, and he didn't think it was being played the way it should be. But he didn't go around looking for trouble, but if it was necessary to take a position, he took it honestly.

On Vietnam, we shared a, privately between us we shared a dismay at what was going on. Even when he was secretary of state as I remember, he may have kept to himself, I don't remember now whether he was doing anything publicly in asserting positions on that, but there was no question that he chafed uncomfortably. It was a very, again you know so well, it was a troublesome period and he came to realize that by gaining what he had, an importance in the foreign policy area, he was losing his opportunity to speak up publicly in disagreement with, for example, what Johnson was doing in 'Nam. But I don't remember anything more specific than that about it.

**DN:** Your two great areas of international expertise were Latin America and the Middle East. Did he particularly seek your advice on Latin American issues, or did he show much interest in Latin America?

**SL:** Well except for some comments about Cuba, maybe one or two issues that have now disappeared so I can't immediately give you an answer, but he was not a, the answer that I had been looking for. He knew because I griped it all the time to him about the fact that the American people, as Scotty Reston said, "They'll do anything for Latin America except read about it." And Ed was no different. He faced the reality of knowing that if he took a position on some foreign policy, or some Latin American issue it might or might not make a difference and, if so, what difference? I think that he wanted to be helpful, but I don't think that he really wanted to get involved too much. And that was the way he and his colleagues saw Latin America. The Middle East was, as I said before, was the one where he took positions, but I don't think he took them strongly and publicly.

**DN:** Did he talk to you at all after his 1971 trip to the Middle East and give you some of his impressions?



**SL:** Yeah, he did, and I disagreed with some things and agreed with some others. He felt that the United States had a responsibility to help bring peace to the Middle East. I think that his attitude at that juncture was that we may have been too favorable toward Israel and didn't quite put it in those terms, but he came back with a different feeling than the one he took with him when he left.

**DN:** That was an extraordinary trip for him.

**SL:** You went with him?

**DN:** Yes.

**SL:** What happened on that trip, I don't know.

**DN:** Well, the two major events really were, one, simply the, in addition to meeting Golda Maier and [David] Ben-Gurion and a young Ezer Weizman, Shimon Peres, Teddy Kollek, [Menachim] Begin, met Begin, and I think it was [Yitzhak] Shamir, in Begin's apartment in Tel Aviv and listened to them one evening arguing among themselves about who did what during the Irgun period. And, but in addition to catching a flavor of Israeli politics at the time, it was the physical impact if you will of seeing how small Israel was and going up onto the Golan Heights and recognizing how vulnerable the country was militarily from the Syrian side. That was one piece of it.

The other was an evening with Anwar Sadat and Mrs. [Jihan] Sadat where they had a very relaxed and open exchange, followed by an appointment the next day with [Mohammed Hassanein] Heikal, and having Heikal sort of feed back to him almost verbatim that conversation and realizing that Heikal had listened to a tape of the evening discussion. And so he got both the sense of Sadat's flexibility and the highly controlled society that that represented in the manipulation that was going on. And at the time I felt he came away with the sense that this was, and would continue to be, an extraordinarily complicated set of issues. And he didn't quite know how you sorted them out, even though we had a role to play, but it was impressions of people and impressions of geography, and not any great strategic sense of what needed to be done at the time. That's one reason I was wondering if you'd gotten any impression from him at the time as to what he was thinking. He didn't always share his innermost thoughts with staff.

**SL:** At one point, I don't know when, before or after the trip and so forth, I remember his talking with excitement about the trip, how much he learned. He'd been a little hesitant about doing it, said he didn't know whether or not he could be helpful, whether or not it would be useful for him to be doing that. But I can't recall now whether it was before or after that we talked and this note of, I was going to say, urgency, about doing something that would be helpful to bringing peace in the Middle East.

**DN:** The one thing he did during that part of the trip was to carry a message from Golda Meir to Sadat, seeking the release of some Israeli airmen who had been captured. That's the one message I remember him carrying and pushing. I don't think anything happened with it, but he

did push that.

**SL:** Of course, on the middle shelf, [pointing to a photograph on Ambassador Linowitz's bookshelf] Sadat could make a believer out of you and Ed wanted to be a believer. He's one of the most exciting, talented people I've ever met, and he could have me eating out of his hand if I didn't keep watching. So for Ed to have been brought this close to this man he thought was a great man and an issue like the Middle East where he, by virtue of his office, became the central figure in moving one way or another was for Ed coming full circle. And I loved to see his excitement about it.

**DN:** As you saw Ed and met with him during the period when he was seeking the presidential nomination, what sorts of impressions did you have of his psyche at the time, his response to the race, his feelings about the race?

**SL:** Well, here you have to help me because I can't, whenever he did that television, televised speech where he was Abe Lincoln -

**DN:** Well that was 1970. That was the congressional, during the congressional race in 1970.

**SL:** Oh, was it then?

**DN:** Where he was seated outside a home in the, yes, yeah.

**SL:** I remember he was gleeful about that, he thought that that had been a ten strike. And it was fantastic. I never knew him to project before or after as he did in that speech. He, I guess he never got over the fact that he was knocked out of the race by the New Hampshire weeping episode, whatever it was; bitter at the New Hampshire extremists who had done him in and wanted to get rid of him because they were afraid of him as a candidate. He felt betrayed as I remember. He had this hideaway office, and I used to go down there and talk with him, but for a long time he didn't want to see me or I guess anybody else. I can't remember who was his secretary at the time, encouraged me to invite him to do things. He never would. I would go into that dimly lit office with the lights on, and he sitting behind the desk, but he was carrying a heavy load.

**DN:** How long did it take him to shake that off?

**SL:** Quite a long time. From my experience I want to say that six months to a year, I think. I felt distressed when I did see him because he was flagellating himself, what did he do wrong, and, "How could he let these sons-of-bitches," do so and so. It was sad.

**DN:** As you look back on Ed Muskie's career, what are the things that strike you the most about his personality and his talents, and his strengths and his weaknesses?

**SL:** Integrity, you have to say that. You looked at the guy and you'd say, boy, if anybody ever had integrity that's the guy. He was a Puritan type. He was not willing to trifle with truth. I. . . . From when I first got to know him until his death, there was for him no alternative to integrity.

You said what you believed to be the truth. You worked to help others see this truth as he saw it. And he brought an objectivity and a willingness to keep an open mind that were quite rare.

**DN:** Thank you very much. I'm sorry, but time is running out for us and you have another appointment.

**SL:** Yeah, I, we'll have another chance to chat.

**DN:** I hope so. Is -

**SL:** What are you going to do with this?

**DN:** We are transcribing the tapes -

*End of Interview*